

THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

"News from Next Door"

APRIL 1 - APRIL 7, 2009

COUNTY MANAGER TELLS DEPARTMENTS TO HOLD LINE ON SPENDING, INCLUDING SALARIES

PG. 10A

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35 cents

County jobless rates rise

All N.C. counties saw increase in January; Perquimans rose 1.4%

The unemployment rate in Perquimans County jumped from 9.6 percent in December to 11 percent in January.

According to the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina, 4,654 people in the county were employed in January out of labor force of 5,232, meaning 578 people locally were out of work.

Perquimans County isn't by itself in seeing a winter jump.

Unemployment rates increased in all of North Carolina's 100 counties in January, including 71 counties other than Perquimans with a rate of 10 percent or higher.

"The ESC is continuing to help our customers who come to us in this difficult time seeking jobs and unemployment benefits," said ESC Chairman Moses Carey Jr.

"The ESC is paying record amounts of benefits to transitional workers and will distribute over \$200 million in benefits from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009."

By comparison, Chowan County's rate jumped from 11 to 12.8 percent while Pasquotank's rose from 8.4 to 10.6 percent.

The unemployment rate in Gates County rose from 6.4 to 7.7 percent while Camden's December unemployment rate of 7.6 rose to 9.8 percent.

Dare County showed the highest unemployment in the state with a rate of 17.3 percent.

State says Winfall's finances improved

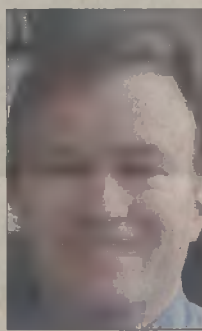


Yates

LGC said the sale of the [water] system would remove a large financial burden from the town

Town is considering increasing block rate which would increase rates for high-volume users

Total expected Winfall budget reduction is \$12,375



Darden

By CATHY WILSON
Staff Writer

The state's last meeting with Winfall officials regarding the town's financial condition has produced a more positive letter from the Local Government Commission indicating that the town's cash flow has improved.

However, in the letter, written by Sharon Edmundson, director of the LGC's fiscal management division, it appears that the improvement in the town's financial situation is in part based on the sale of its water department to the county.

"Your decision to negotiate the sale of your water system and all its operations to Perquimans County effective July, 2009 is another positive step in restoring the town's financial well being," Edmundson wrote the town.

"As you stated, the sale of the system will remove a large financial burden from the town, will save your citizens money in their water bills, and will allow the water fund to repay loans given from the general fund."

But County Manager Bobby Darden said Friday that the county has no plans to purchase the water system from Winfall.

In fact, Darden said, the county has not been asked to purchase the system.

Darden said Winfall Mayor Fred Yates approached the county on behalf of the town and asked if the county would be interested in assuming ownership of the system. No sale was discussed nor has a sale been negotiated.

The county understood that it would assume ownership to relieve Winfall of the cost of upkeep and operation.

Darden said at a recent workshop to kick off discussion of the county's 2010 fiscal budget, some county commissioners asked about a sale of the Winfall water system because they had heard rumors that the county intended to purchase it.

Darden said there was a consensus among the commissioners that the county is not interested in purchasing the plant, but is willing to assume ownership of the plant - provided that it is unencumbered.

The county presently sells water to Winfall in bulk.

Officials with LGC said Friday they cannot say how not selling the water system will affect Winfall's financial condition because it is a complex issue.

Edmundson met with Yates and Winfall's accountant, Terry Chappell, on Feb. 24 to discuss the state's concerns over the town's finances and steps taken by the town to address those concerns.

According to the LGC, Winfall ended the last fiscal year (June 30) with an \$8,545 deficit, giving the town a negative 1.95 percent reserve fund available for emergencies.

Since then, the town has increased its real estate tax rate, adjusted anticipated revenues and cut expenditures to help improve the town's cash flow.

The LGC, part of the state's treasurer's office, requires local governments and municipalities to keep at least 8 percent of their general fund in reserves (about one month's expenditures) in order to stay fiscally responsible.

The Feb. 24 meeting occurred after the state determined Winfall's overall financial condition had declined to an unacceptable level and required immediate correc-

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tive action.

Edmundson and staff met with town officials after town council amended its budget ordinance adjusting revenue projections and cutting expense line items.

"Your amended budget gives a more realistic view of revenues especially given the overall drop statewide in sales tax revenue," Edmundson wrote after meeting with the Winfall duo.

"One of our primary concerns was that the town has enough financial resources to pay its debt service payments and you have assured us that you now have the cash flow to make those payments," she added.

"After reviewing your revised budget and interim financial data, we agree that the cash flow for the town has improved and that making those debt service payment should not pose a problem for the town."

It is not clear whether the town was expecting funds from the sale of the water system mentioned in Edmundson's letter to make the payment.

Edmundson also talked with town officials about the town's water and sewer rate increases, and its plan to turn its water system over to the county on July 1.

Winfall raised its water and sewer rates a year ago from \$6 per thousand over 2,000 gallons to \$8 per thousand over 2,100 gallons.

In addition, according to the LGC, the town is also considering going to an increasing block rate structure that would increase rates for high volume users, namely Central and Perquimans Middle schools.

Edmundson wrote that the town intends to keep and maintain its sewer collection system, possibly seeking federal stimulus funds to fund future sewer projects and rehabilitate the existing system.

The town's general fund dropped last year due to several reasons, the state pointed out. Winfall transferred money from the general fund into the town's ailing water and sewer fund, and the town overestimated revenues in the general fund that never materialized without cutting expenditures.

Budget amendments approved March 9 included adding expected revenues in property and vehicle taxes, but reducing sales tax, police receipts, and funds coming in for beautification and using the town's facilities.

Expense wise, the amendments reduced administration by \$500, police by \$5,925, fire by \$3,000, roads and grounds by \$2,950, among other items for a total reduction of \$12,375.

Water revenues in the water fund were reduced by \$9,000 as were the expenditures. Sewer fund revenues were reduced by \$5,950 as were those expenditures.

DOT employee charged in wreck



By CATHY WILSON
Staff Writer

A North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) employee has been charged with failing to stop for a traffic light after the NCDOT truck he was driving collided with another vehicle on U.S. Highway 17 Monday morning, sending three people to the hospital.

According to the North Carolina Highway Patrol, Donald Perry, 51 of Elizabeth

City, was driving a 2002 Ford pick-up truck, registered to NCDOT, northbound on Highway 17 around 9:28 a.m. when he reportedly swatted a bug on his ear with his hat, accidentally knocking off his glasses.

State police say the truck ran through the red light and collided with a 1998 Pontiac, driven by Eboni Warren, 25, of Hertford, who was attempting to turn left onto Highway 17 from New Hope Road.

Warren was transported by Nightingale to Norfolk Sentara Hospital while Perry and Germaine Stokley, 22, of Elizabeth City, were transported to Albemarle Hospital by members of Perquimans EMS. Stokley was a passenger in Warren's vehicle.

Members of Winfall and Hertford Fire departments responded and extricated the injured from the car.

Trooper K.R. Briggs investigated the accident.

Town sponsors energy conservation workshop

By CATHY WILSON
Staff Writer

The best consumer energy saver is right at your fingertips...literally.

Brian McGinn, residential energy advisor for Electricities, says use your fingers to turn off lights and appliances, adjust thermostats, and install insulation to help lower your utility bills.

"The best energy conservation tools I know of are your own fingers," he told Hertford residents who attended a free energy workshop March 24 at the firehouse.

About 25 utility customers turned out to hear money-saving conservation tips as well as garner information on home weatherization and

home improvement financing programs in the area.

Town officials offered ways for customers to save money and even explained the format of the town's utility bill in an effort to help customers understand it better.

Each family that attended received a free energy saving kit as well as a water conservation kit complete with information and products to help reduce the customer's electric and water usage and costs.

Town Manager John Christensen explained the town's ElectricSave program, a load management program that helps the town conserve energy and save the utility customer anywhere from \$4-\$20 a month on the utility bill.

Signing up for the program allows the town to cycle various appliances chosen by the

customer during peak times of the day, usually between 3-5 p.m. in the summer and 7-9 a.m. in the winter.

The average cycle time ranges from a few minutes to two or three hours, four days a month.

Appliances that can be cycled by switch include the electric water heater and heat pump/central air.

"By managing the heat and air in the home, the town is able to save on energy costs, so that savings is passed on to the customer," Christensen said.

He also said customers can ask for a utility bill history showing electrical and water

usage over a period of time. Such history, he says, can show that the customer has a water leak and not even know it.

"If your water bill is steadily creeping up, you could have a water leak," he explained.

"Remember, if you have a water leak, you are actually paying for that leak twice. Your sewer charge on your bill is based on the amount of water you use.

"So, if you have a water leak, you're going to pay for it in the water charge and in the sewer charge. It's very important to find those leaks and take care of them."

Christensen pointed out that each water meter has a leak detector. Customers can determine if there is a leak by checking the water meter.

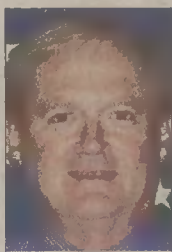
First make sure there is no water running in the house, then check the meter.

"If the meter is moving, you need to find the leak," he added.

Chris Wharton, director of utilities for the town, said toilets are the main culprits for slow, quiet water leaks.

"You'll be surprised to find how much that is costing you a month," Wharton said.

Other agencies taking part in the workshop included the Albemarle Commission, the Economic Improvement Council, Perquimans County Extension Office, and USDA-Rural Development.



Christensen

ENERGY-SAVINGS TIPS

- Use compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs rather than standard light bulbs. CFL bulbs use about 25 percent of the energy of standard light bulbs and last 10 times longer, saving the customer about \$40 in electricity during its lifetime.
- Make sure the heating and cooling system is working at maximum efficiency. Install a programmable thermostat that allows the system to remain comfortably low in the winter and comfortably high in the summer.
- Insulate exterior walls, ceilings, attics, crawl spaces and basements.

- Weatherize the home by sealing openings with caulk, mastic, spray-foam or weather stripping.
- Use ceiling fans as you adjust your thermostat settings.
- Air dry dishes in the dish washer instead of using the drying cycle.
- Turn off appliances like computer and monitor when not in use.
- Plug TVs and DVD players into power strips which can be turned off when not in use.
- Wash only full loads of dishes and clothes. Using cold water saves energy.

WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY
HIGH: 66 LOW: 54
PARTLY CLOUDY

FRIDAY
HIGH: 70 LOW: 51
ISOLATED T-STORMS

SATURDAY
HIGH: 68 LOW: 50
PARTLY CLOUDY

